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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000519

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BE](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: BELGIAN-DRC RELATIONS AT A NADIR

REF: A. KINSHASA 475

[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 719

[1](#)C. BRUSSELS 819

Classified By: DCM S. Brock for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Diplomatic relations between the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Belgium remain tense following controversial statements by Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht on human rights, good governance, and corruption in the DRC (ref C). The Congolese government has recalled to Kinshasa its ambassador to Belgium for consultations and closed its consulate in Antwerp. In addition, the GDRC sent a signal of protest over the weekend of May 24 by ordering the Belgian consulates-general in Bukavu and Lubumbashi to cease operations. These posts closed June 2, but the Belgian diplomats in those provincial cities were not ordered to leave the DRC. The developments are but the latest chapter in long history of mutual distrust and personal dislike between President Kabila and Foreign Minister De Gucht. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Critical comments on May 20 by Belgian Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht on human rights, good governance, and corruption in the DRC (ref C) triggered a rapid cooling in relations between Belgium and the DRC. On May 23, the GDRC recalled its ambassador to Belgium to Kinshasa for consultations. A Belgian embassy political officer explained June 3 that the GDRC decision was made easier by the fact that the ambassador was already in Kinshasa. He will not return to Brussels for the time being.

[1](#)3. (C) The same day, the GDRC announced the closure of its consulate in Antwerp. The Belgian officer told us the decision was mostly a ploy for the Congolese government to dismiss its consul there, who was named during the Transition government prior to democratic elections in 2006. The party allotted the foreign affairs portfolio during the transition was the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), headed by Jean-Pierre Bemba. Bemba's appointee as consul in Antwerp has refused to take instructions from Kabila's government, militating instead for Bemba.

[1](#)4. (C) The officer told us the GDRC sent the Belgian embassy an official request via dip note over the weekend of May 23-24 ordering Belgium to close its consulates-general in Bukavu and Lubumbashi. The Belgian government replied publicly that it did not want to do so. Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme followed up with a phone call to Prime Minister Gizenga May 27 in an attempt to repair relations and avoid closing the two posts.

[1](#)5. (C) According to the officer, Katanga Governor Moise Katumbi and South Kivu Governor Louis Muderhwa, both members of Kabila's PPRD, met respectively with the Belgian

consuls-general June 2 to tell them they must close operations. They did so the same day. Instead of relocating to Kinshasa, the consuls-general will temporarily relocate to Brussels. The Belgian embassy will continue to support security and maintenance staff at the consulates.

¶16. (C) The officer made clear that no Belgian diplomat has been expelled from the country. He said Belgium does not currently plan to send a special envoy to repair relations. It will continue to work through official channels to resume good, normal diplomatic relations.

¶17. (C) Presidential Advisor Andre Kapanga told us June 5 that De Gucht,s comment that Belgium had a "moral right" for involvement in the DRC was the final straw in a festering relationship between De Gucht and Kabila. According to Kapanga, who was Kabila's political and diplomatic counselor at the time, this began with De Gucht,s first visit to the DRC following his July 2004 appointment as Foreign Minister. Kapanga claimed De Gucht has lectured Kabila and other senior officials every time he has come to Kinshasa. Meetings have sometimes ended in shouting matches.

¶18. (C) Kapanga said that following the 2006 elections Kabila thought that relations with Belgium might start with a clean slate. However, De Gucht,s tone and attitude did not change. Kapanga said that the GDRC views De Gucht as a politician more concerned with a domestic constituency in Belgium than in developing a strong relationship with the DRC.

¶19. (C) Comment: The deterioration of Belgium-DRC relations

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appears to be based in large part on the distrust and personal dislike between De Gucht and Kabila. Kabila's decision to downgrade diplomatic relations between the two countries is a signal that negative consequences will accrue unless Belgium's leaders change their attitude and official discourse. For the wider diplomatic community, the chill in relations risks prejudicing an ongoing dialogue on wide array of legitimate human rights and good governance issues. End comment.

GARVELINK